The ſmall ſucceſs of the Goſpel in purifying the hearts and lives of men, accounted for, from the neglect of diſcipline and training, in domeſtic, civil, and eccleſiaſtic ſociety:

A SERMON,

Preached before

The SOCIETY in SCOTLAND for propagating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

At their Anniverſary Meeting,

In the HIGH CHURCH of EDINBURGH,

On Friday, June 5. 1772.

By ARCHIBALD STEVENSON, A. M.

Miniſter of the Goſpel at ST MADOES.

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To the RIGHT HONOURABLE,

THOMAS Earl of KINNOUL, &c.

Preſident of the Society in Scotland for propagating Chriſtian Knowledge,

The following SERMON,

Preached before the SOCIETY,

In vindication of a RELIGION which he loves, and honours,

Is humbly inſcribed

By

His LORDSHIP's

Much obliged and

Moſt obedient Servant,

ARCH. STEVENSON.

A

SERMON.

JEREMIAH, viii. 22.

Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no phyſician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

THE meaning of the Prophet, though expreſſed in metaphorical language, is very obvious. He vindicates the ways of God towards his ancient people, and charges all their wickedneſs and miſery upon themſelves. When an able phyſician undertakes the cure of a ſick or wounded perſon, and furniſhes him with the beſt medicines for that purpoſe; if the patient rejects the offered aſſiſtance, or neglects to uſe the preſcribed medicines, and dies through that neglect, his blood muſt be on his own head. Almighty God took the nation of the Jews under his ſpecial protection and care; and gave them advantages for becoming a wiſe, a holy, and happy people, beyond all the other nations of the earth: but, by an ungrateful and perverſe alienation of heart from him and his ſervice, they incurred a forfeiture of his favour, and of all the benefits of his diſtinguiſhed goodneſs, and brought on

 themſelves

themſelves diſtreſs and miſery. We in this iſland have been favoured by Heaven much beyond God's ancient people. To them he ſpake by his ſervant Moſes; to us he hath ſpoken by his own Son. Every thing in the goſpel-diſpenſation correſponds to the ſuperior dignity of its author. It is full of grace and truth, the miniſtration of righteouſneſs and of life, and hath a happy tendency to reform the hearts and lives of men. This ſovereign remedy, which Heaven has appointed for the cure of our diſtempered ſouls, we have long enjoyed pure and genuine, without any of thoſe mixtures which had been invented by fooliſh, ſuperſtitious, or deſigning men. What now is its ſucceſs? Have we been reſtored by it to health and ſoundneſs? Are wiſdom, piety, and holineſs, our national character? Alas, this will not be affirmed by thoſe who think moſt favourably of the age. The good effects of our religion are every day leſs apparent; and vices which formerly hid themſelves in darkneſs, now dare the light. Infidelity avails itſelf of this, and turns that impiety and profligacy of manners, of which itſelf is the parent, or the nurſe, into an objection againſt the goſpel. The objection merits an anſwer. The friends of our religion have fully ſhown its tendency to promote the ſafety of ſociety, and the virtue and happineſs of mankind: but this is not enough. Men have learned to found their judgement concerning all ſchemes of public utility, not on theory, but experiment. Appealing then to facts, ſhall we call the

the attention of mankind to the good effects of our religion at its firſt appearance in the world? Theſe indeed are confeſſed even by its enemies; but that object is now too remote to make a ſtrong impreſſion, eſpecially when ſo little ſimilar to it appears in our times. We affirm, that the balm hath not loſt its virtue, nor hath the ſkill and goodneſs of the phyſician ſuffered any abatement: but it is incumbent on us to ſhow why ſo few are cured; and this we will do, by laying the blame, not on the patients only, but on others alſo, and chiefly on thoſe with whom they are connected, and whoſe buſineſs and duty it is to apply this excellent medicine for the purpoſe of healing them. My meaning is, that in civil, religious, and domeſtic life, men muſt be formed to what is great and good; and if they are not, but eſpecially if they are formed to oppoſite purpoſes, we are not to wonder if they ſhould be the worthleſs and contemptible creatures we too often find them. —— For illuſtrating this, I propoſe, by divine aſſiſtance,

1. To ſhow, that it is highly unreaſonable, to demand, or expect, that the Chriſtian revelation ſhould have its full effect in regulating the tempers and manners of men, where there is a general neglect of the proper method of training them.

2. I will inquire to whom it chiefly belongs to form and train men to religion, and what is incumbent on them for that purpoſe. And,

3. We will find ourſelves obliged, for vindicating the honour of our holy religion, to look

a little at the execution of this important duty.

I. I am to ſhow, that is highly unreaſonable, to demand, or expect, that the Chriſtian revelation ſhould have its full effect in regulating the tempers and manners of men, where there is a general neglect of the proper method of training them.

It is a capital truth in our religion, which we ſhould never loſe ſight of, that God is the great agent in the ſanctification of corrupted men. The graces which adorn the minds of his true ſervants, are the fruits of his Spirit; but in the production of theſe ſpiritual, as of material fruits, he works according to fixed laws, and by inſtituted means. To theſe laws indeed he is not confined; and inſtances may be produced of a *ſeeming* violation of them, when important ends in his providence are to be promoted. I call ſuch violations only *ſeeming*, becauſe they may be, and probably are, in the order of the great ſyſtem of the divine œconomy, hid from men. But to expect any production or effect in a way not conformable to the known laws of nature, muſt be deemed altogether unreaſonable. The huſbandman knows, that the powers of vegetation are the work of God, and that the beſt-cultivated field owes its fruitfulneſs to the genial heat of the ſun, and the nouriſhing dews of heaven; but if he neglects to ſtir and manure the ſoil, the failure of his crop he charges, not on providence, but on himſelf: and why ſhould we heſi-

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tate to aſcribe a deficiency or failure in thoſe fruits of righteouſneſs which are the genuine produce of the precious ſeed of God's word, to a like cauſe? As to expect a crop from grain which is not caſt into the ſoil, would be accounted abſurd; ſo it is no leſs abſurd to expect, that the truths of religion ſhould have any effects on thoſe who do not know them. And how many are there in this land of light, and not in the remoter parts only, but in the centre of the country, and in our capital cities, who, by their ſituation and circumſtances, are deſtitute of the neceſſary means of religious inſtruction; and who, unleſs proviſion be made by others for this ſalutary purpoſe, muſt live and die in ignorance?

But ſuppoſing perſons have acceſs to the means of religious knowledge, will any one acquainted with human nature expect, that a proper uſe will be made of theſe by any number of mankind unleſs they are put upon it? The human underſtanding, under proper direction, is capable of high improvement, but would generally remain uncultivated if perſons were left to themſelves. In childhood and youth eſpecially, the objects of ſenſe and animal paſſions occupy our thoughts, and excite our active powers, ſo that hardly could we be brought, without the influence of authority, to turn our attention to any thing foreign to theſe views. It is needleſs, indeed, to inſiſt on ſo plain a point as the neceſſity of receiving religious inſtruction from others.

Is it not alſo evident, that to give force to the

the truths of the goſpel, they muſt be *believed?* From the authority of the revealer they derive all their influence. It is this that makes them mighty through God to captivate the hearts, and bend the wills of men. To produce then the genuine effects of religion, the keeping in full force a ſenſe of this authority is indiſpenſably requiſite in all ages. But in an age where infidelity prevails, not in the upper only, but in the middle ranks; not among the learned, and half learned, but even among thoſe who have no pretenſions to learning, how is the contagion to be ſtopped? how are the young to be protected from it? How eaſily will it catch hold of minds greedy of pleaſure, and anxious to be relieved from the uneaſy reſtraints of religion? Is it to be expected, that the miniſters of the goſpel, unaided by thoſe who ought to be concerned for the welfare of ſociety, and the beſt intereſts of their families, and of mankind, will be able to ſtop the progreſs, or prevent the pernicious effects, of this growing evil?

But on ſuppoſition that the truths of the goſpel are believed, it ſhould ſtill be remembered, that the heart is the principle of action; and unleſs they are felt there, they can have no effect. Here, indeed, lies the peculiar province of the miniſters of the goſpel. To them it eſpecially belongs to explain, inculcate, and enforce, the great doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity; and if they have a clear and extenſive knowledge of them, and of the ſprings of the human heart, to which they correſpond,

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and poſſeſs the ſkill of adapting the one to the other, they can hardly fail to make ſome impreſſion on the minds of their hearers.

But ſuppoſing this, and ſuppoſing alſo a regular attendance on the public ſervices of religion, which every one knows is not to be ſuppoſed, if no methods are taken to ſecure it by thoſe whom it concerns, do you expect that mankind are to become good in conſequence of impreſſions made on their hearts once a-week, or occaſionally, by the teachers of religion? Sometimes indeed this may be the caſe: a ſingle truth may go to the bottom of a man's heart, and leave ſuch an impreſſion there as ſhall remain through the whole courſe of his life: but that it will generally, or often, ſo happen, no man will affirm who knows human nature. Our principles of action are as manifold and various as the affections of the heart, and theſe will ſtir and operate in their turn when their proper objects come before them. Hence the conduct of the bulk of mankind is looſe and irregular, directed to no fixed point. They purſue this or that object juſt as fancy or preſent inclination prompt them. He who is actuated by ambition to-day, will be the ſlave of pleaſure to-morrow; and the man who not only perceives, but feels, the force of religious obligations on the Lord's day, will loſe theſe impreſſions in the buſtle of buſineſs through the week, and conduct his affairs with very little regard to the obligations of religion or morality. It is a *law in human nature*, That, to render conduct regular and uniform,

niform, there muſt be one fixed and governing principle in the heart. It is this that conſtitutes character; and without it men have no character at all. When we know a man's leading principle, or, in other words, what his heart is chiefly and habitually ſet upon, we are at no loſs to form the moſt probable judgement as to the part he will act in any ſuppoſed caſe. We do not expect generous deeds from one of a ſelfiſh and ſordid turn of mind; nor can we eaſily believe, that a man of known honour will do baſe or mean actions.

If then, in order to its having a ſteady and uniform influence, the religious principle muſt be the governing one in the heart, it may be aſked, how doth it acquire this ſuperior ſtrength? That it proceeds from nature, the moſt ſanguine advocates for the entire and perfect ſtate of the human powers and principles will hardly affirm. Its worth, its ſuperior dignity, its right to govern, will readily be allowed; but that it is oppoſed by the corruption of the heart, muſt alſo be confeſſed. Let us not then heſitate to affirm, that it is implanted in the ſoul by the grace of God; and that from the ſame grace it derives its ſtrength and vigour. But let it not be forgotten, that men are workers together with God, and that to this growth in ordinary caſes culture is neceſſary. This heavenly plant increaſes as it is watered: it is ſo with all the principles of the human heart; for it is a *law* to which they are ſubjected, That they grow or decreaſe as they

they are cheriſhed or neglected. This law is vouched by uniform experience. That bad diſpoſitions grow by indulgence, is a fact that every one will admit; and that good affections languiſh and die for want of care, is no leſs certain. There are not wanting examples, of perſons naturally humane and generous, who, by a bad education, have loſt the benefit of thoſe good diſpoſitions, and have turned out ſelfiſh, and even cruel; and ſome, who, in early life, gave ſymptoms of a turn for piety, through a neglect of culture, and by a courſe of criminal indulgences, have gradually loſt all ſenſe of God and religion, and are become thoroughly profligate. Of all good principles, the religious and Chriſtian require to be cultivated with moſt care, not only on account of their worth and importance, but alſo the difficulty of raiſing them to any high degree of ſtrength and firmneſs. Other principles have their objects at hand, in ſight, or at no great diſtance; they are eaſily brought into view, and they put in motion the ſprings to which they correſpond. On this account, men may be trained to act upon thoſe principles with leſs difficulty. The trouble indeed, and pains, will always be greateſt where the object is moſt remote: of which you will be ſenſible, by attending to the well-known difficulty of forming men to prudence, or what is called the wiſdom of this world; for a man's intereſt upon the whole, which is his real intereſt, and the object of this wiſdom, being generally at ſome diſtance, takes but a ſlight

hold of the heart, in compariſon of thoſe particular goods, which being near at hand, excite the particular appetites and affections of human nature.

For this reaſon, one may venture to affirm, that no one will be thoroughly wiſe as a child of this world, in whom that wiſdom hath not been carefully cultivated: and indeed the number of thoſe in whom this is the ruling principle, is not very great, notwithſtanding all the pains taken to form it. If this is the caſe, we need not wonder that ſo few poſſeſs the *true wiſdom*; for all its objects are out of ſight. The juſt muſt live by faith; by faith in an inviſible God, the moral governor, witneſs, and judge of men; by faith in an inviſible Saviour, an inviſible conductor and guide, and the inviſible realities of a future ſtate of retribution. Is it to be expected, that this principle will operate ſteadily, and with force, if it is not cultivated with care? Great and powerful as its objects are, their influence will be ſmall in compariſon of thoſe inferior ones which continually ſolicit the ſenſes, the imagination, and the animal affections, if perſons are not accuſtomed to turn their attention to them, and to make their importance and reality the ſubject of ſerious and frequent thought.

But how is this to be done? How is this method of cultivating the religious principle to be practiſed? Are there any numbers of mankind, either capable or willing to view and contemplate, and dwell upon thoſe inviſible

ſible objects, if they are not put upon it, and carefully trained to it?

But let me add, that though this were practicable, more is ſtill neceſſary. Attention, thought, meditation, will not give ſtrength to our good principles and diſpoſitions, unleſs we are *trained to act* upon them. Without this they will have no *ſteadineſs*. They may feel ſtrong in the cloſet, when the truths of religion are the ſubjects of devout meditation; but will operate weakly and irregularly in the commerce of the world. Every one is ſenſible of the neceſſity, the abſolute neceſſity, of exerciſe and action, in order to give firmneſs to every good principle, except that of religion. No parent who is not a fool, will expect, that his ſon ſhall turn out a man of honour, by any views he can give him of the worth and dignity of that object, if he doth not look after his conduct, and put him on avoiding the mean, and acting the honourable part in life. In this way the ſpirit of buſineſs is formed: it is naturally weak at the outſetting, and greatly overmatched by the love of eaſe and pleaſure; but one need not be told, what an amazing degree of ſtrength it will acquire by a regular courſe of application. By exerciſe our weakeſt principles become ſtrong, and without it the ſtrongeſt languiſh and become feeble.

How then are men to be trained to the practice of religion? Every one can readily anſwer the like queſtion as to any other art. Perſons muſt be carefully trained to it, not by themſelves, but by others; and that not by inſtruc-

tion and perſuaſion only, but by authority and example. It is in this manner that men are bred to letters, to arts, to manufactures, and to every profeſſion and buſineſs in ſociety. No man doth well without an apprenticeſhip and a maſter. And why ſhould there be an exception with regard to religion? Of all arts, it is the moſt important to ſociety, to individuals, to the preſent and future happineſs of men: it is at the ſame time the moſt difficult, its principles the hardeſt to be wrought into the heart, and of all others meet with moſt oppoſition there. If then little or no care is taken to form men to religion, are we to wonder, that there ſhould be little conſcience and religion in the world? It is rather to be wondered at, that the goſpel ſhould have any ſucceſs at all, when ſo little is done to give it effect, and ſo much to deſtroy its influence on the hearts and lives of men.

But whoſe fault is it, if the culture of religion is neglected? and on whom muſt the blame be laid? This merits our attention, —and is

II. The ſecond branch of this diſcourſe.—— To whom then doth it chiefly belong to form men to religion? and what is incumbent on them for that purpoſe?

I am ſenſible there are not a few who think that this is the buſineſs of the clergy, and of them only. "Who ſhould inſtruct the people in the nature of religion, who ſhould perſuade them to conduct themſelves by its rules,

rules, but the miniſters of the goſpel? Is not this the end of the inſtitution, and are they not paid by the ſtate for doing this good ſervice to ſociety?" No doubt, to teach and inculcate the truths and duties of the goſpel, is one eſſential part of the buſineſs of its miniſters; and whether they acquit themſelves well or ill in it, we will not now inquire: but if it is demanded of them that they ſhould teach thoſe who refuſe to be taught, or perſuade thoſe who will not liſten to their perſuaſions, it would be the hardeſt taſk that was ever impoſed, and to make them reſponſible for their bad ſucceſs, the moſt unjuſt and rigorous uſage. Would any maſter in any profeſſion or art, think himſelf anſwerable for the ignorance or unſkilfulneſs of his pupil or apprentice, if the young man was left at liberty to attend him only when he pleaſed, and his maſter ſeldom had an opportunity of giving him a leſſon? If the public teachers of religion are to be at all anſwerable for the ſucceſs of their miniſtrations, it muſt be with thoſe that are docile and tractable, who carefully attend upon them; and, if they are young eſpecially, are looked after at home, that the good effect of the leſſons given them may not be deſtroyed by follies and vices which they ſee practiſed by thoſe about them, and to which they are all uſed by inclination and example.

There is hardly any accompliſhment that belongs to earth or heaven, which thoſe in the upper, and even in the middle ranks of life, are more ſolicitous to have their children perfected

fected in, than the art of politeneſs. Now, ſuppoſing, that for the attainment of this art, (which we do not mean to diſparage, though we muſt be permitted to ſay, that the art of holy living is much ſuperior), a parent hath put his ſon under the beſt maſter, that is, in the beſt company; if, nevertheleſs, the young man's inclination led him to aſſociate for ordinary with perſons of indelicate and ruſtic behaviour, and he was to be found only now and then among the well-bred, it could not be expected, that his manners would acquire any high degree of poliſh.

Thus too, in the caſe before us, the demands made upon the miniſters of the goſpel, in the character of public teachers, to which, in the opinion of many, the greater part, if not the whole of their importance and uſefulneſs is confined, are evidently unreaſonable. At the ſame time, this part of their office, being the inſtitution of God, is of indiſpenſable neceſſity; and the due execution of it, with ſuch helps as might reaſonably be expected, and eſpecially if not counterworked, would be of the greateſt ſervice in promoting the good of ſociety, and the beſt intereſts of mankind.

But the important office of training mankind, muſt not be wholly devolved on them in the character of teachers, or in any other to which they may be intitled. What I have already ſaid on the former head, will direct our thought to others to whom this alſo belongs. —If to turn mens attention to the intereſts of their ſouls and eternity be the beſt ſervice we

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can do them, and the beſt exerciſe of Chriſtian charity, every one will find himſelf under a high obligation to conſult and promote the ſpiritual good of his fellow creatures, as far as the ſphere of his ability and influence extends; and if thoſe who are connected by the ties of blood, friendſhip, neighbourhood, or acquaintance, would do the kind office of inſtructing, adviſing, admoniſhing, and reproving one another, as occaſion may require; and eſpecially, if thoſe who truly *fear the Lord*, would not only *ſpeak often one to another*, but unite their counſels and endeavours, to convert ſinners from the error of their ways; the effect of this in promoting the ſucceſs of the goſpel would be very great.

But I muſt confine my thoughts to thoſe who, by their rank and ſtation, have it moſt in their power, and are in a more eſpecial manner bound to do this ſervice to God and men. Now there are three ſocieties with which we find ourſelves connected, the domeſtic, the civil, and the eccleſiaſtic; and in each of theſe ſocieties perſons ſtand to each other in the relation of governors, and governed. Every family muſt have a head; in every civil aſſociation there muſt be magiſtracy; and in every church, however conſtituted, there ſhould be government and diſcipline. The buſineſs, then, of forming and training men to religion, as it is a part of ſocial duty, muſt chiefly devolve on thoſe who are at the head of theſe ſocieties, and have a right to command in them. Let us therefore conſider what they who are placed

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in thoſe ſtations can and ought to do for the advancement of religion, *firſt*, by their authority, which demands ſubmiſſion; and *ſecondly*, by their example, which muſt be the object of imitation.

1. I ſay, they have it in their power, and will find it their duty in their reſpective ſpheres, to countenance and promote religion by their *authority*. —— I know, it is one of the ſtrange paradoxes of which the preſent age is fruitful, that authority ought not to be exerciſed in matters of religion. It is even aſſerted, that parents ſhould leave their children to chuſe their religion for themſelves, and beware of giving an early bias to their minds, which may prevent a rational choice when they arrive at a proper age of judging for themſelves. —That infidels, or enemies to all religion, ſhould adopt and propagate ſuch opinions, is not to be wondered at; but that believers in divine revelation ſhould heſitate a moment about the obligation that lies upon parents to train up their children *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, is truly ſurpriſing. Is there any thing in the character of Abraham, next to his faith in God, for which he is more celebrated, and on account of which he was more in favour with God, than that he exerciſed the authority which belonged to him as the head of a numerous family, and of a great nation, in *commanding* his children and his houſehold to keep the way of the Lord? Chriſtian parents cannot think themſelves leſs obliged to attend to the religious education of their children

children than the Jewiſh; and we know, that they were ſtrictly injoined by God himſelf, to *command* their children to obſerve, and to do, all the words of his law. It were much to be wiſhed, that the inſtruction given to the young were confined to the eſſentials of religion, and that their attention were not turned from theſe to the peculiarities of particular ſects and parties. But admitting, that this is not always attended to by parents, and that through their ignorance, or prejudices, or bigotry, ſome miſtaken ideas of religion are inſtilled into the minds of their children, yet we would aſk, whether it is not better in itſelf, better for ſociety, and better for the riſing generation, that ſome errors or miſtakes ſhould be mixed with the truth in a religious education, than that children ſhould be left to grow up without any acquaintance with God and religion at all, in the hope, the fooliſheſt in the world, that when they come of age, and after habits of inattention to God, and every thing ſacred, ſhall have taken place, they will then ſit down, and make religion their ſtudy, and chuſe for themſelves, upon rational inquiry, and rational grounds, what ideas they will receive, and what reject? This method of leaving youth to grow up untutored as to religion, hath been tried in too many inſtances; and the effect is juſt what might have been expected: The greater part, inſtead of chuſing a rational ſyſtem and plan, find it more ſuitable to undiſciplined and vitious inclinations, to have no religion at all.

I do not however mean to aſſert, that young people ſhould be formed to religion by authority alone. Religion is a rational ſervice, and ſhould be made ſuch in the young, as ſoon, and as far as their capacities will admit: but parental authority muſt be interpoſed, otherwiſe their attention will be ſeldom, if ever turned to theſe important concerns. In the preſent corrupted ſtate of human nature, there are but few grown people who conduct themſelves in religion by the principle of conſcience ſingly, and the pure love of God and goodneſs; hopes and fears have a large ſhare of influence on their conduct: and why parents may not take the aid of the ſame principles in training their children, is not eaſy to ſay.

It is true, that in the moral and religious ſenſe, there is no worth in any actions, however good in themſelves, that are not done from choice: but that fund of Chriſtian knowledge which children are in a manner conſtrained to acquire, may, in proceſs of time, by the bleſſing of God, be the foundation of a real love and attachment to religion; and thoſe reſtraints which are laid by authority on vitious inclinations, by checking their growth, will prevent bad habits, and make the diſcipline of the heart a much eaſier taſk than it would otherwiſe be.

I ſcruple not then to affirm, that it is in the ſchool of parents, and under the influence of their authority, that the ground-work of religion muſt be laid; and were this authority exerciſed with judgement and propriety, the face

face of things in civil ſociety, and the church of God, would be ſoon changed for the better. If the children of every Chriſtian family were carefully inſtructed in the great Bible facts, and the plain eſſential doctrines of the goſpel; if the great duties of religion were explained, and earneſtly inculcated upon them; if their hearts, at that time of life, ſoft and tender, were made to feel the force of religious truth; if their attention was frequently called to God, as the witneſs, governor, and judge of men, and they were taught to have a ſacred reſpect to him in their thoughts, words, and actions; if they were reſtrained from indulging their irregular inclinations, and, which would be of the laſt conſequence, accuſtomed to reſtrain themſelves; if whatever hath a tendency to corrupt their hearts were carefully removed from them; in ſhort, if they were trained to the knowledge, the feeling, and the practice of religion, under the eye and authority of their parents, it might be hoped, that, by the bleſſing of God, they would come out into the world fenced in ſome degree againſt its corruptions, ſuperior to its temptations, and fitted to act their parts well in the courſe of life. And why ſhould not this be done for them? It is what they are intitled to by the laws of nature and of Chriſtianity, and what every parent, in this church at leaſt, ſolemnly vows to perform.

But alas, it is vain to look for the fulfilment of this important obligation. It is the misfortune of many thouſands in the lower

ſpheres of life, to have been neglected in their own education; and ſuch muſt be unqualified, even though they had the inclination, (and how general is the want of inclination in ſuch perſons?), to inſtruct their children. Nay, it is the misfortune of many thouſands in the ſame rank of life, to have been trained up in irreligion, intemperance, lying, and the arts of fraud and deceit: and is it to be imagined, that ſuch perſons will cultivate good diſpoſitions in their children? This evil, which affects ſo large a body of the people, is truly lamentable, and calls for ſympathy and relief from thoſe who can afford it; for without that relief, it will in all probability go down, ſpreading ſtill wider and wider in its progreſs, from generation to generation.

But might it not be expected, that thoſe in eaſy or affluent circumſtances, poſſeſſed of the means of giving their children the advantages of a religious education, would lay themſelves out to do them this important ſervice? The neglect of it, even in thoſe who do not believe, or do not mind religion themſelves, is hardly reconcileable to the common principles of human nature, and ſurely not conſiſtent with a prudent regard to the wordly proſperity of their families. They may be ſenſible of this, when they look about them, and obſerve the diſtreſſes brought on many families, by ſuffering the youth of both ſexes to grow up without any ſenſe of religion, and to be corrupted by libertine principles, maxims, and examples.

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But leaving this claſs of men, with pity for their unhappy children, (for unhappy they muſt be, though heirs to the largeſt fortune, if taught to live as if there were no God); what ſhall we ſay of Chriſtian parents who have the power, and yet want the inclination, or will not give themſelves the trouble of training up their children in the ways of God? Can ſuch conduct admit of any apology? can they account for it to God, to their country, their children, or themſelves? Do they find it their duty to train up their children in every accompliſhment ſuited to the rank they hold in ſociety, and can they acquit themſelves of blame in neglecting thoſe higher accompliſhments which fit them for being heirs of the kingdom of God? or if they beſtow much pains on other things, and but little on this *one thing needful*, muſt they not be ſelf-condemned? They know what attention and care are neceſſary to form the manners of their children to the ſtandard of politeneſs; and can they be ignorant that more attention and more care are neceſſary to form their morals to the ſtandard of Chriſtian duty? They are abundantly ſenſible of the danger of ſuffering their children to aſſociate with perſons of clowniſh, ruſtic manners; and can they be inſenſible of a much greater danger, in allowing them to frequent the company of the irreligious and profligate, who make not the offices of piety only, but all ſobriety, and decency of behaviour, the ſubjects of mirth and ridicule? They who are truly concerned about the beſt

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intereſts of their children can be at no loſs about this part of their duty. The errors commonly committed, flow not from a defect of underſtanding, but from corruption of heart. And nothing can be a fuller evidence that there is little real religion and Chriſtianity in the world, than the general neglect of religious education among all ranks. It is melancholy to obſerve what pains perſons will beſtow in training their dogs and horſes, and how little in forming their children to any thing great or good.

There is, however, a certain number in the higher ſpheres of life, and in every rank, who are ſenſible of the deep guilt contracted by thoſe parents in whoſe ſkirts will be found the blood of their children, and who make conſcience of diſcharging this important duty; upon whoſe pious endeavours, under God, much of the hope we can reaſonably entertain of the revival of religion, and future ſucceſs of the goſpel, muſt depend.

Let us now turn our eyes to another claſs of men, the governors of civil ſociety; and conſider what they can and ought to do by their authority, for the ſupport and encouragement of religion. Here we meet with a like objection to that which we have already conſidered in the caſe of parents; namely, That civil authority ought not to be employed in the cauſe of religion. And we will readily allow, that as to this, as well as every other object, it hath its limits, beyond which it cannot lawfully be exerciſed. Conſcience acknowledgeth

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no authority but that of God; and every attempt to ſubject it to any human juriſdiction, is tyranny of the worſt and moſt intolerable kind. But in this land of freedom, of freedom even to licentiouſneſs, there is no occaſion for beſtowing any time or pains in ſhewing the unreaſonableneſs of ſuch abuſe of civil power. It cannot however be admitted, that civil authority hath no concern with religion, unleſs it is thought that religion hath no influence on the welfare of ſociety. This ſentiment, unknown to the founders of the beſt-poliſhed ſtates of antiquity, is now broached among us. As we have moraliſts who paſs by, or but ſlightly mention, our duties to God; ſo we have likewiſe politicians who would promote the intereſts of ſociety without making religion any part of their plan. Virtue is ſtill allowed to be eſſential to the proſperity of our country; at leaſt we have yet no politicians of any name, bold enough to ſet aſide its neceſſity: but to think of virtue or morality without its only genuine ſupport, religion, is the ſame folly as to think of building a houſe without a foundation.

It is ſaid, That religion being a principle ſeated in the heart, civil authority, which can take cogniſance of outward actions only, cannot make men religious. And we will readily admit, that no human authority can make men truly good. Nothing but God, and his truth, can do this. But is it not of conſequence, that the truth which purifies the heart, ſhould have the countenance and ſupport of civil authority, and that it ſhould be protected from

from the inſults of vain and fooliſh men? And is not a reſtraint upon evil deeds by the penalties of civil government, ſome reſtraint alſo on the evil principle from whence they proceed? and doth it not prevent that general corruption of principles, as well as manners, which would be the effect of licenſed impiety and wickedneſs?

I might further obſerve, that every ſimple form of civil government hath its principle, to which all wiſe lawgivers and ſtateſmen muſt have a ſtrict regard; and as ours is not ſimple, but mixed, nothing can be ſo fit to unite and combine the principles of that compoſition as religion. The fear of the Lord is the wiſdom of ſtates as well as of individuals. From it civil authority derives its beſt ſupport; and by the influence of this principle men depart from many evils which human laws cannot prevent. Much hath been done to diſmiſs this fear from the minds of men, and the pernicious effect in producing a licentiouſneſs of manners is but too apparent.

But why give ourſelves the trouble of proving that religion is the concern of the civil magiſtrate? Are we not a Chriſtian ſociety? and is not religion, the Chriſtian Proteſtant religion, an eſſential part of our civil conſtitution? Yes, my brethren, we have a title to be governed by Chriſtian magiſtrates; and our governors, whether poſſeſſed of legiſlative or executive juriſdiction, are ſtrictly bound to protect and countenance our religion, and to promote both the knowledge and the practice

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of it. Bleſſed be God, by the wiſdom and piety of the nation in former times, proviſion hath been made for religious inſtruction. By the ſame wiſdom laws have been enacted againſt open immorality and profaneneſs; and theſe we acknowledge to be ſufficient, and that there is no occaſion for more ſtrictneſs in this article, unleſs we may be permitted to ſay, that to give force to laws grown obſolete, or fallen into diſuſe, the revival of them by the ſame authority, in times of abounding iniquity, may be neceſſary. But the beſt laws without execution can have no effect. A failure here brings authority into contempt, and emboldens men to offend. It was the ſaying of an ancient ſage, that the city is miſerable where the magiſtrate commands the laws, and not the laws the magiſtrate. Very happy it is for ſociety, when magiſtrates are actuated by a becoming zeal to check the progreſs of impiety and wickedneſs by legal and competent means. When poſſeſſed of this good ſpirit, they will proceed in this work with vigour, and the good effect will be ſenſibly felt. This, as it is the duty, ſo it will be the diſpoſition of every magiſtrate who is himſelf a good man and a Chriſtian. Supported by the laws both of God and his country, he will be *a terror to evil doers*. But, on the other hand, I will take the liberty to ſay, that whoever in this office, important both to religion and civil ſociety, ſhifts or declines this part of his duty, or diſcharges it with reluctance and apparent ill-will, is falſe

to God, to his country, and to the truſt repoſed in him.

Before I quit this part of the ſubject, I would obſerve, that there are in civil ſociety a large body of men, who, though they may be poſſeſſed of no legal juriſdiction, have it nevertheleſs in their power, by another ſort of authority, which is real, to advance or obſtruct the ſucceſs of religion. High rank, extenſive property, and great wealth, give a large ſphere of influence to their poſſeſſors over numerous domeſtics and dependents. Upon them art and induſtry, in a great variety of branches, rely for ſupport. Now it is obvious, how effectually irreligion and wickedneſs may be diſcouraged, and piety and goodneſs promoted, by ſuch perſons. If in diſpenſing their favours a preference were given to the wiſe and the good, if impiety and profligacy were made a bar to all hope of benefit from them, it is eaſy to ſee what happy effects this would produce. And might not this be expected? Is it not an object worthy of the attention of the rich and the great? Would not ſuch a conduct be as beneficial to themſelves and their families, as it would be honourable to God, and ſerviceable to religon? Wealth, power, and extenſive influence, are talents for which men muſt be accountable. They ought to be employed for the honour of the giver, and the beſt intereſts of mankind: and if, in the application of them, little regard is had to theſe important purpoſes, the future reckoning muſt be dreadful.

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We proceed next to conſider, by what exerciſe of eccleſiaſtical authority the ſucceſs of the goſpel, in purifying the tempers and lives of men, may be promoted. The nature of this authority is different from that of parents and civil governors. *Its weapons are not carnal, but ſpiritual.* It admits of no force or compulſion, or any penalties which affect the bodies or temporal eſtates of men; and it claims no juriſdiction *over them that are without.* My ſubject doth not lead me to a diſcuſſion of the queſtion, Where this authority is lodged? It is ſufficient for my purpoſe, that in every church, however conſtituted, there muſt be government; and that thoſe who govern, ought to maintain that order and diſcipline which is of divine inſtitution. Now the terms of admiſſion to Chriſtian ſociety, the characters of its members, the diſcipline to be exerciſed towards them in the caſe of offences, and the conduct by which a ſuſpenſion or deprivation of Chriſtian privileges is incurred, are all marked in the ſacred books; and by the rules reſpecting theſe, the exerciſe of church-authority ought to be regulated. Whatever other points we may differ about, we muſt, one would think, be all agreed in the following:— That no perſon groſsly ignorant of the plain fundamental truths of the goſpel ſhould be admitted to the communion of the church:— That no profeſſed infidel, or one who, though he does not openly avow infidelity, yet commonly and cuſtomarily withdraws from all Chriſtian aſſemblies, hath any right to be conſidered

ſidered as a Chriſtian, or to have any of the privileges peculiar to a Chriſtian beſtowed upon him: — *That every brother who walketh diſorderly* ought to be admoniſhed; and if the offence is of a public nature, ſhould be publicly rebuked; and if he perſeveres in ſuch offence, and obſtinately refuſeth to hearken to the admonitions of the ſociety, ſhould be excluded from it, and treated *as a heathen man and a publican.* About theſe points there can hardly be any difference among Chriſtians who take their ideas of Chriſtian ſociety and fellowſhip from the New Teſtament; and as to theſe, if the diſcipline of the church of Chriſt were ſtrictly executed, its effects on the purity of its members would be very great. If the ignorant and profligate were refuſed acceſs to the privileges of Chriſtian ſociety, there would be more knowledge of religion, and more ſobriety and decency of behaviour among the people: if well-judged and well-timed admonitions were given to every brother that walketh diſorderly, in the ſpirit of meekneſs, and with that authority which the office-bearers in the church of Chriſt have received from him, this would often have great effect in reclaiming ſuch perſons: and if the cenſures of the church were inflicted on groſs or obſtinate offenders, and, as the apoſtle injoins, Chriſtians did avoid the company of ſuch perſons, that they might be aſhamed, ſuch exerciſe of diſcipline would contribute much to the general purity of morals.

In this way the church of Chriſt, in the apoſtolic

poſtolic and primitive ages, preſerved her purity without the aid of civil authority; and ſhe would do ſo ſtill by the ſame means. What apology then can be made for thoſe who bear rule in the houſe of God, if they pay little or no regard to that order which he has eſtabliſhed in it; and, in oppoſition to expreſs injunctions, permit the ignorant, the unbelieving, the ungodly, and profane, to enjoy the name and privileges of that ſacred community? Whatever reſtrictions may be laid on other churches in their diſcipline, ours lies under none. The right of exerciſing it in every eſſential article is confirmed as fully as it can be by civil authority,

The general corruption of manners may be pleaded as an excuſe for ſlackening the reins of diſcipline; but in vain. This ſlackening is one of the chief ſources of that corruption. The apoſtle obſerves, in the caſe of one ſingle offender retained in the church of Corinth, that *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;* and requires them, for preſerving the whole body from corruption, to cut off the rotten member. The application of the proper remedy becomes more neceſſary, when a diſtemper ſpreads, and the whole community is in danger of being infected by it. It may be deemed a vain thing to expect, that diſcipline ſhould be exerciſed in the church according to the goſpel-plan. Perhaps it is; but thoſe who are veſted with authority, muſt be anſwerable for the conſequences of their own unfaithfulneſs; and it is eaſy to ſee, that the conſequences

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muſt be as diſhonourable and hurtful to religion, as they are diſgraceful to themſelves.

2. We come now to ſhew, in the ſecond place, how the ſame perſons in their ſeveral ſpheres may and ought to promote religion by their example.——The deſire of imitation is one of the ſtrongeſt active principles in human nature. It appears in the early part of life. Children are obſerved to copy every thing they ſee and hear; and it is by imitation that they acquire the uſe of ſpeech, and improve in the exerciſe of all their powers. As they grow up, they are led, by affection and reverence for their parents, to conſider them as the beſt models by which they can form their manners. They do not, and ought not to ſuſpect, that thoſe to whom they owe their being, and of whoſe tender care they have continued proofs, would ſet them an example, which it would be wrong or dangerous for them to follow; and that example will be conſidered by them as good authority, and a ſufficient juſtification, whatever contrary leſſons or inſtructions may be given them. The bias of human nature is evidently towards vice and folly; and when that is ſtrengthened by parental example, all attempts to turn it to an oppoſite direction muſt be vain. You may reaſon with a young man upon the guilt and danger of this or the other vice in which he allows himſelf, but all your arguments will be to little purpoſe, if he can ſay, I do nothing but what my father doth. This will be thought a ſufficient excuſe for common ſwearing, lying, drunkenneſs, neglect of all

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the offices of piety, and even ſcoffing at every thing ſerious or ſacred. Every parent muſt be ſenſible of the hurt done to his children by a bad example, and he muſt be very wicked and very cruel upon whom this ſingle conſideration hath no reſtraining influence.

But it is not enough that parents ſay or do nothing before their children that is poſitively vitious: they ſhould train them alſo to what is good, by ſhewing it in their own conduct; and in ſuch a way too as may engage their love as well as imitation. Piety and virtue, when genuine, are always amiable. They have a beauty, a charm, to which the hearts of the young can hardly be inſenſible. It is the ſourneſs and auſterity which enters ſometimes into the character of the friends of religion, that gives it an ungainly and forbidding appearance. In the gay ſeaſon of life eſpecially, every thing moroſe gives diſguſt; and nothing can ſo effectually recommend religion to the young, as their obſerving that it chears the countenance, and gladdens the hearts of thoſe who practiſe it.

But it is not in childhood and youth only that mankind are governed by example. The ſame principle of imitation hath influence through the whole of life. To the multitude, cuſtom and faſhion are the rule in every thing. They do not give themſelves the trouble of judging what is fit and unfit. It is enough for them if it is the prevailing mode. This regulates their dreſs, their amuſements, the forms of breeding and ſocial intercourſe: but it doth

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not ſtop there; it extends its ufurped dominion over principles and manners, truth and virtue. Nay, ſuch reverence is paid to it, that thoſe who ſee the falſehood and abſurdity of faſhionable opinions, will feign an aſſent to them. And faſhionable follies and vices will be boaſted of by thoſe who never committed them. It makes hypocrites in religion, when religion is held in juſt eſtimation; and hypocrites in infidelity and profligacy, when theſe come to be in reputation. This being the caſe, the examples of thoſe who are thought intitled to preſcribe, and give the mode, in ſociety, cannot fail to be of the moſt extenſive influence.

And to whom doth this right belong? Upon inquiry, it will be found the allowed privilege and prerogative of thoſe who hold the firſt rank in ſociety, and the high offices in government and magiſtracy.——Superficial obſervers may be apt to think, that men of ſuperior learning and judgement give a ſtamp of authority, at leaſt a currency, to opinions. But this will be found a miſtake: for few are capable of judging where that ſuperiority lies; and thoſe who are, will have little attention or reſpect paid to their judgement, if their circumſtances are narrow, or their ſtation in life obſcure. But let a few of thoſe in the high ſpheres of life, unite in their verdict, and their influence, whether juſt or otherwiſe, will immediately prevail. In they are the ſovereign arbiters of right and wrong, truth and falſehood. Opinions and

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manners which have the ſtamp of their approbation, go down, ſtep by ſtep, almoſt to the loweſt claſs of the people, every claſs taking the faſhion from thoſe immediately above them. It is in the power of this body of men, or of any conſiderable number of them, to bring religion into credit or diſrepute: and if religion is eſſential to the well-being of ſociety, to the preſent and future intereſt of men, what obligations lie upon them to countenance it by their example? how careful ſhould they be, to ſay and do nothing themſelves, and to allow nothing to be ſaid or done in their preſence, which may derogate from its truth, importance, and uſefulneſs, without marks of their diſapprobation? Good men, and good men doubtleſs there are in every rank and ſtation in ſociety, will feel the weight of this obligation, and oppoſe with ſpirit the torrent of prevailing impiety and wickedneſs. Even they who have no higher principle than a regard to their country, will ſee the neceſſity of acting the ſame part.

Give me leave to obſerve, that the neglect of religious duties by men of rank, carries a peculiar indecency and impropriety in it. They who are ſenſible of what is due to their own ſuperior ſtation, ought not to be inſenſible of the reſpect due to the Supreme Being. The attendance and homage which they expect from their inferiors, ſervants, and dependents, ſhould put them in mind of the attendance and homage, which, as his creatures and vaſſals, they owe to the King of kings.——A

like obſervation may be made as to thoſe who frame and execute the laws of their country. If a ſenator or magiſtrate, expreſſes a contempt of, or indifference about, that religion which hath the ſanction of civil authority, or gives countenance to its profeſſed enemies, every one muſt be ſenſible that he acts ſhamefully out of character. He, of all others, ought, in a ſpecial manner, to reſpect the laws of God and his country; and if he violates them, he muſt be doubly criminal. Againſt ſuch, the ſarcaſm of the Apoſtle applies with great propriety: *Thou who commandeſt that a man ſhould not commit adultery, doſt thou commit adultery? Thou who makeſt thy boaſt of the law, by breaking the law diſhoureſt thou God?* Rom. ii. 22. 23. The irreligious or immoral conduct of legiſlators and magiſtrates, muſt undoubtedly have the moſt pernicious influence. For what regard can it be expected ſhould be paid to the laws againſt drunkenneſs, lewdneſs, profanation of the Lord's day, and the like, if they who ſhould be the guardians of theſe laws, are themſelves the tranſgreſſors of them? With what heart or countenance can judges and magiſtrates inflict the legal puniſhments of vice and immorality, if they are known to be themſelves immoral? To make their characters reſpectable, and to give weight to their authority, they ſhould not only be above reproach, but exemplary in the obſervation of the laws of religion and virtue. The leaſt countenance given by them, even to folly and diſſipation, whether in ſpeech or conduct, is peculiarly

unſuitable

unſuitable to the gravity and decorum which becomes their office and ſtation, and muſt have bad effects on the minds and morals of the people.

But if they who are intitled to govern and take the lead in civil ſociety, owe it to their ſtation and their country, to be exemplary in religion and virtue, a ſtill higher obligation to the ſame conduct lies on thoſe who bear rule in the church of God. They are overſeers, and ſhould therefore be blameleſs; inſpectors of the morals of others, and ought, for that reaſon, to be above reproach. Their buſineſs is, to train the ſubjects of the kingdom of God for a ſtate of higher purity and happineſs; and therefore they ſhould be models of every Chriſtian grace. If their temper and conduct do not correſpond to this character; whatever talents they may poſſeſs, they muſt be ill qualified for their office, and unſucceſsful in the diſcharge of it; odious in the ſight of God, and deſpiſed by thoſe whom they wiſh to pleaſe. What force or efficacy can there be in good counſels or perſuaſions from the mouth of a bad man? How ungracefully muſt he tender reproof, who is himſelf guilty? And what weight can there be in any act of diſcipline exerciſed by one who is himſelf liable to cenſure? In every Chriſtian church, a large ſhare of the government is committed to the paſtors, and from them better and more perfect examples may be expected, than from thoſe who govern in civil or domeſtic ſociety, or indeed from any other perſons. To form themſelves and others to religion, is their ſole

occupation; and to this their time, and thoughts, and labour, ſhould be devoted. Hence mankind are diſpoſed, and juſtly, to make more allowances for faults in any order of men, than in the clergy. In times of general corruption, examples of eminent piety are much wanted; and if they are not found among the miniſters of the goſpel, where elſe can they be looked for?

I know, that the prevailing manners are urged as an apology for the follies and faults of our order: and it muſt be acknowledged, there is a hazard of our catching the infection. We are in danger of becoming leſs zealous for religion, when religion is by many deſpiſed or neglected; of being leſs devout, when devotion wears out of faſhion; and, when the age is become diſſipated, of laying aſide the gravity and decorum of our character, and aſſuming an air of levity; which muſt ſit very aukwardly on thoſe whoſe buſineſs it is to announce to mankind the awful things of futurity. The danger is indeed real, but we ſhould guard againſt it; and as we have ſuperior obligations, ſo we have ſuperior advantages, for elevating us above the world, and preſerving us from the contagion of its ſpirit.

We know, that the general corruption of manners in the Jewiſh nation, was ſo far from being admitted as an excuſe for their prophets and prieſts, that much of the national guilt was charged to their account; becauſe they ought to have ſtood up for God, kept themſelves pure, and exerted their utmoſt efforts to ſtem the torrent of prevailing impiety.—So

long

long as the body of the clergy preſerve the ſpirit of their office, and maintain the dignity of their character, their authority will be reſpected, and their example will have conſiderable influence on the people. But if they grow inſenſible of the peculiar obligations which lie on them to cultivate the pious and devout temper: if, aſſuming the air of men of the world, they are more anxious to be diſtinguiſhed by the politeneſs, than by the purity of their manners; by an eaſy pliable diſpoſition, which yields to the follies of the times, rather than a becoming boldneſs and fortitude in ſtanding up againſt them: if, inſtead of abſtaining even from the appearance of evil, they are not very ſolicitous to avoid what is really evil: when this becomes the character of many of thoſe who ſhould edify the church of God by their example, as well as preſerve order, and exerciſe diſcipline therein, it is eaſy to foreſee what muſt be the conſequence:— The pure doctrine, and holy precepts, of the Lord Jeſus, will be diſregarded, and his name and goſpel blaſphemed.

I will conclude this part of my diſcourſe with one obſervation, which ſeems to deſerve attention. In civil ſociety, corruption of manners commonly begins at the head of it, and is propagated downwards. It is otherwiſe in the church: its miniſters and governors are generally laſt in the defection. In the former ſociety, the governors may be much corrupted, and yet the body of the people may be for a time kept free from the infection; but when

thoſe who bear rule in the church come to be tainted, the diſorder is in its laſt ſtage, and all hope of recovery is gone. When ſuch deadly ſymptoms appear in any Chriſtian ſociety, the friends of religion and of mankind ought to take the alarm, and unite in ardent prayers, and vigorous endeavours, to prevent the dreadful cataſtrophe.

We have now ſeen, that infidels are unreaſonable in their demands upon our holy religion;—that it could not ſuperſede, but ſuppoſes inſtruction and diſcipline;—that though it furniſhes the beſt principles, and the beſt rules of holy living; yet to the art of conducting life by them, men muſt be trained, and that not by themſelves only, but by others;—that though public inſtruction is of great uſe, and even indiſpenſable to the ſucceſs of the goſpel; yet this is far from being ſufficient, and that other means of training are abſolutely requiſite.—We have ſeen alſo, upon whom this important office of forming the tempers and manners of men chiefly devolves, and what is incumbent on them for that purpoſe, both as to authority and example.——To complete the argument, and for a full vindication of the honour of our religion, it now remains that we look a little at

III. The execution of their duty; which was the third branch of this diſcourſe.

With reluctance I enter upon this part of my ſubject. It is but an unpleaſant taſk, to repreſent the ways of men, when they are not ſuch

ſuch as one would wiſh them to be. My particular ſituation doth not give me acceſs to know ſo much of that conduct which I ſhould now ſet forth, as many who hear me: I will ſpeak of it with caution, and rely upon your candour.

May I not be permitted to ſay, that in every rank and ſtation in ſociety, religious education, in all its different branches, is more and more neglected? Miniſters who labour in country-pariſhes know, that this is the caſe among thoſe in the loweſt ranks. They are made ſenſible of it to their ſorrow, by the little knowledge, or deſire of knowledge, poſſeſſed by the young. This is a dreadful preſage of the ignorance and corruption of the next generation.—Is there more attention given to this matter in the cities? We wiſh there were: but as the complaint grows more general, that in thoſe places few children or young perſons attend at times appointed for catechiſing, or examination; this ſhows, that parental authority is but little exerciſed in the matter of religious education. In former times, children were taught to read the Bible in ſchools, and in this way got ſome knowledge of the facts reſpecting our holy religion. But that book is now ſeldom read in places of polite education. The good old cuſtom of teaching children a catechiſm wears much into diſuſe, at leaſt in the higher, and even among the middle ranks. Inſtruction is the earlieſt and eaſieſt part of religious education; and when that is totally neglected, or but ſuperficially performed, nothing

further

further is to be expected. The truth is, that there is but little of the face or form of religion in many families, which would not, however, be thought irreligious. How few keep up the worſhip of God in their families? and how many afford their preſence only now and then in Chriſtian aſſemblies? or if, from a regard to decency, they are regular in their attendance; yet how little of the ſpirit of religion appears in their common converſation and behaviour? Parents who give their children ſuch examples, will hardly train them up in the ways of God; or if they took ſome pains about this matter, their own practices would render all their labour ineffectual.

There is one caſe which would touch the heart of a mere barbarian; I mean that of children brought up in families where diſſipation reigns from the one end of the week to the other, the Lord's day not excepted; where they neither ſee nor hear any thing in favour of religion or morality, but a great deal of faſhionable libertine talk, to the diſparagement of both. Is it not painful to think, that there ſhould be any ſuch nurſeries of impiety and wickedneſs in a Chriſtian country?——It is unneceſſary to add any thing further. Religious inſtruction and training are confined to a few families, and grow more and more into diſuſe.

We ſhould next inquire, how far civil authority contributes its aid to the ſupport and encouragement of religion.——Proviſion is made

made for religious inſtruction, and laws are enacted againſt immorality and profaneneſs. We will leave it to others to determine, whether that proviſion is ſufficient; and we have already acknowledged, that in the matter of laws, no more ſtrictneſs is neceſſary. It were well, if theſe laws were duly executed. That they are not, is a fact too notorious. Drunkenneſs, rioting, promiſcuous lewdneſs, adultery, and groſs profanation of the Lord's day, are offences puniſhable by the laws, and commonly committed; yet paſs with impunity. Except from ſtatute-books, we ſhould hardly know that ſuch laws exiſted. The blame ſurely muſt lie ſomewhere among the officers of juſtice. It is not our buſineſs to inquire upon whom it falls. It is ſufficient to ſay, that through their neglect, the order of ſociety is diſturbed, and the intereſts of religion grievouſly hurt. The concern which the legiſlators and rulers of Greece and Rome ſhewed for morality, and alſo for religion, as it was by them underſtood, and the zeal with which they checked every attempt on either, are well known to thoſe who have the ſlighteſt acquaintance with hiſtory; and what outrageous inſults are every day offered to the true religion, and even to moral virtue among us, without ſeeming to give offence or concern to thoſe who ſhould be the guardians of both, need not be mentioned. It is indeed, thanks to God, our happineſs to have a prince upon the throne, who adorns the religion of Jeſus, to which he is firmly attached, by the genuine piety of his heart, and the purity of his

manners. His exemplary virtues, in better times, would have had much influence, not only on all about the throne, and in the firſt ranks in ſociety, but on the body of the people: and that it hath but little, the late frequent adulteries and divorces are full proof; and theſe ſhow a diſſoluteneſs of manners, which ſcorns all the reſtraints of religion, order, and decency.

It is the unhappineſs of our neighbouring church, to be reſtrained from the exerciſe of a great part of the diſcipline which belongs to her as a church of Chriſt; whereby the moſt ſacred inſtitutions of religion are profaned, and the peculiar privileges of Chriſtians often proſtituted to impious and profligate men. In our national church, where the exerciſe of diſcipline, in its moſt eſſential branches, lies under no legal reſtraint, if any thing is wrong, the blame muſt lie upon its rulers. And ſhall we pronounce them innocent? Would to God we could! The ſtate of religion would then wear a more agreeable aſpect. But the errors are too notorious, and cannot be diſſembled; and are as contrary to the fixed rules and conſtitutions of our church, as to the laws of the New Teſtament.

Beſides the general neglect and omiſſion of the more private acts of diſcipline, to which there are few of us who muſt not plead guilty, it is well known, that the public cenſures are confined to two or three kinds of offence; and a man may be notoriouſly guilty of many ſins which exclude from the kingdom of

God,

God, without having his title to the name and privileges of a Chriſtian ſo much as called in queſtion. Are not ignorant and worthleſs men often allowed to ſtand ſponſors for their children in baptiſm? and, which is ſtill more ſhameful, is not this privilege not ſeldom vilely proſtituted, by being indulged to perſons who give little or no evidence of their belief of the goſpel? How little reſpect is had to character, in admitting to the Lord's table; and to how few of thoſe who, on account of their ignorance, or bad lives, have no title to this privilege, is it denied? May I not be permitted to ſay, that in beſtowing the office of elderſhip, no great attention is ſometimes given, even to common decency of behaviour? and, which is ſtill worſe, and muſt have the moſt fatal effects, not only is the door to the miniſterial office made wider and wider, but ſtrange methods have been uſed to prevent worthleſs men from being ſtripped of that ſacred character. Theſe are facts but too well known: and can it be expected, that religion ſhould flouriſh in a Chriſtian ſociety, where ſuch diſorders prevail? Alas! theſe diſorders are but too plain evidences of a declining in our zeal for the honour of our divine maſter, and the ſucceſs of his goſpel, in purifying the hearts and lives of men.

We are unwilling to ſay any thing of the ſocieties of Chriſtians who have ſeparated from us: As they have left us, diſſatisfied with ſome of our public meaſures, (of which there may be good ground of complaint, though not ſufficient to juſtify a ſeparation), it might be ex-

pected, that in modelling their ſocieties, particular attention would be given to thoſe rules of order and diſcipline which ought to be obſerved in the church of Chriſt. Without entering however into any detail, we believe, that the candid among them will acknowledge their defects in ſome important articles: and candour obliges us to own on our part, that the judicious and well-intentioned among them, have ſtronger temptations to yield up unacceptable points of diſcipline which they might wiſh to obſerve, than we can have under a legal eſtabliſhment.

It is then but too evident, that our religion has not the aid to which it is intitled, and by which its ſucceſs ſhould be promoted, either in domeſtic, civil, or eccleſiaſtical ſociety. On the contrary, in every one of theſe, ſomething is done to weaken, and in ſome of them, to counterwork its influence. Still, however, its good effects under all theſe diſadvantages would be more apparent, if Chriſtians, in forming and training themſelves and others, would proceed with more judgement. Our ſpiritual and moral diſorders would receive a more complete cure, if the medicine with which Heaven has furniſhed us, were taken and applied according to the form preſcribed. But the error of too many is, that they take it not whole, but by halves, or parcels.

Some expect every thing from the truth, if firmly aſſented to by the underſtanding; and therefore think of little elſe in religion, but making their aſſent as firm and ſtrong as they can;

can; perſuaded, that if they ſucceed in this, every thing elſe will follow of courſe.—Others lay the chief, if not the whole ſtreſs, upon good affections; and if, by meditation and devotional exerciſes, they can keep theſe in any conſiderable degree of height and warmth, they reckon upon it, that they cannot miſcarry.—There are others, again, who believing that the end of all religion is, to lead men to a proper behaviour in life, think it of importance to attend to the laws and rules laid down in the goſpel, but give themſelves little trouble about either the knowledge or feeling of other revealed truths, which ſerve as motives to good conduct, and by which the ſprings of virtuous action ſhould be put and kept in motion.—In each of theſe claſſes, there are ſubdiviſions. Some make all to depend on the belief of one part of the ſyſtem of revealed truth, and others upon another.—In the culture of the heart, ſome cheriſh the pious affections, to the neglect of the benevolent; and others the benevolent, to the neglect of the pious.—And I need not add, that with regard to the duties of life, ſome almoſt confine their attention and care to one claſs, and others to another.—I need not ſtop, to ſhow, that there are great miſtakes affecting the eſſentials of religion, and that they muſt be attended with very unhappy conſequences.

There are two other capital errors, not ſeldom committed, and both in the extreme.—Some forgetting, or not believing, that the truths of the goſpel are only the means of ſanctification,

ſanctification, and that they derive all their efficacy from divine grace, have ſcarce any dependence upon divine agency; and proceed in religion, as if nothing of this kind were to be expected.——Others again carry their dependence upon God, and their expectations from him, to an unwarrantable height, believing and hoping, that without the means which he hath appointed, or the uſe and application of them which he requires, a good work, by his ſovereign grace, will be carried on, and perfected in their ſouls.——It is eaſy to ſee how the influence of religion muſt be leſſened and obſtructed by theſe partial and erroneous views of it.

THE objection to the Chriſtian revelation which we propoſed to conſider, is, we hope, ſufficiently anſwered; as we have ſhown, that even ſuppoſing the effect of the goſpel, in purifying the hearts and lives of its profeſſors, were as ſmall as infidels would perſuade us it is, yet this may be eaſily accounted for, without derogating from its native excellence and uſefulneſs. But after all, the truths of revelation have more influence than is commonly imagined, and influence too where it would be leaſt expected, upon the minds even of the *unbelieving*, who are ſometimes checked in the mad career of impiety and iniquity, by doctrines which they do not perhaps believe; but of the falſehood of which, they are not, and cannot be abſolutely certain. In former times, ſceptics contented themſelves with rejecting

jecting the doctrines of revelation, and believed, or profeſſed to believe, thoſe of natural religion; which, if aſſented to, would have ſome good influence on their conduct. The mode which infidelity hath now aſſumed is little different from downright Atheiſm, and has the moſt unfavourable aſpect on the morals of mankind. The name of Deity is retained; but rectitude, juſtice, and every perfection of the moral kind, are excluded from his character: *Moral* providence is rejected; the liberty and accountableneſs of men, and other intelligent beings, denied; virtue degraded into the rank of a mean of pleaſure, and its excellence, and even its eſſence, pronounced to conſiſt in its relation to an arbitrary ſenſe, which may, like the ſenſe of beauty or harmony, vary in different beings, and has no foundation in nature, or fixed connection with intelligence and reaſon. Is there any thing, Chriſtians, in this ſyſtem, which can reſtrain men from being as wicked as they pleaſe?

The world is bad enough, but would be ſtill worſe, if the irregular appetites and paſſions of men had no other bridle but human authority, and human laws. How many crimes might be committed, beyond the reach of puniſhment from an earthly tribunal? and by what are bad men kept back from ſuch crimes, but the ſecret, though too little felt force of religious and moral truth?

The number of the truly good may fall ſhort of that of the wicked; but there is no reaſon to believe that it is ſmall. Though not many

mighty,

mighty, or noble, or rich, have ever been, or probably ever will be ſo much devoted to God, and the purſuits of immortality, as thoſe in the inferior ſtations of life; yet there are among them, ſome who, ſo far from being *aſhamed of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, in an evil and adulterous generation*, glory in their relation to him, and the hope which they derive from that connection; and are as much diſtinguiſhed by their piety and exemplary goodneſs, as by the rank which they poſſeſs in ſociety.

The number of thoſe who have experienced the purifying influence of the doctrine and ſpirit of Jeſus, is far from being inconſiderable. They are ſcattered up and down, being the ſalt of this corrupted earth; often unknown to, and not ſeldom alienated in their affections from each other, by miſtake and prejudice. It were happy for ſociety, and the church of God, if all who love the Lord Jeſus, laying aſide their particular attachments, would unite their counſels and efforts for advancing the intereſts of his kingdom. The preſent ſtate of religion calls upon them to act this good part.—If confederacies were formed among different nations to invade our country, we would think ourſelves bound to forget our private quarrels, and unite in its defence; and ſhall we not diſcover the ſame good ſpirit, when ſo many are combined *againſt the Lord God, and againſt his Chriſt?* When the champions of the kingdom of darkneſs are ſo zealous to extend that infernal dominion, ſhall not the children of light be equally zealous in enlarging the empire of

their

their Redeemer? This is the object of the Society before whom I ſpeak. To train the benighted inhabitants of thoſe dark places of the earth, the highlands and iſlands of Scotland, to the knowledge and practice of our religion, is the deſign of that worthy body; in the proſecution of which, they have laboured, and continue to labour, with much judgement, diligence, and ſucceſs. The field which they occupied was almoſt wholly neglected: they have planted and watered it, and God has given the increaſe. Many of thoſe who ſat in darkneſs, and in the ſhadow of death, now rejoice in the light of God's word, which they can read in their own language, the only language they underſtand. It is unneceſſary to enter into a detail of what the Society have done, and are doing, for propagating the knowledge of Chriſt, both at home and abroad: ſuffice it to ſay, that the number of ſchools erected and ſupported by them, are 166; in which, by the lateſt reports, above 7000 boys and girls are educated in the knowledge of religion, and the neceſſary and uſeful arts of civil life. I am inſtructed to inform you, that there are calls upon them for more ſchools than their funds can afford to ſupply; and alſo for an augmentation of ſalaries, in order to obtain well educated and qualified maſters; particularly in thoſe places where Popery is prevailing, and Popiſh miſſionaries are eſtabliſhed. The harveſt is great, but labourers are wanting. Much has been done; but much ſtill remains to be done: and ſhall ſo noble a deſign be ſuf-

fered to languiſh for want of encouragement? Heaven forbid.—Let us do juſtice to the preſent age. It is an age of humanity. Every ſpecies of bodily diſtreſs excites ſympathy, and finds relief. An object more deſerving of our pity here preſents itſelf: Thouſands of our fellow-ſubjects, and fellow-men, in danger of periſhing, for want of the food and medicine of their ſouls. Can even common humanity with-hold theſe, if it is in the power of its hand to give them? It is the glory of our religion, that it extends the views, and enlarges and refines the hearts of its votaries. Thoſe who have imbibed its ſpirit, will feel themſelves moved by every principle within them, to contribute their beſt ſupport, to a deſign, in which the honour of God, and the beſt intereſts of men, are ſo deeply concerned. What Chriſtian will not rejoice, in being inſtrumental in reſcuing an immortal ſoul from ignorance, barbarity, vice, and wretchedneſs? In what application of the gifts of Providence can the faithful ſteward find ſo much ſatisfaction, as in laying them out for the honourable, the uſeful purpoſe, of turning men from darkneſs to light, and from the vaſſalage of Satan to the ſervice of the living God?

The worthy members of the Society need no incitement to perſevere in this pious and charitable work. They know it is the work of God; and this alone is ſufficient encouragement to proceed in it with diligence and alacrity. Your own hearts, my honourable, and reverend, and worthy friends, will ever applaud

plaud you, while thus employed. You will be reſpected by the excellent ones of this earth. The angels of heaven will behold you with complacency; and in a little while you ſhall receive a glorious reward. May God encourage your hearts, ſtrengthen your hands, enlarge your power of doing good, and give his effectual bleſſing to all your well-meant endeavours! *that the wilderneſs*, under your culture, *may bloſſom as the roſe, and the deſert become like the garden of the Lord!* AMEN.

Pag. 32. *lin. penult, read*, —ſhort, they

AP-

APPENDIX.

THE Directors of this Society publiſhed, by way of Appendix to the anniverſary Sermon 1769, ſome account of its riſe and progreſs; with copies of two royal patents; the firſt, dated 1709, for erecting the ſubſcribers into a Society for propagating Chriſtian knowledge in the Highlands, Iſlands, and remote corners of Scotland, and in Popiſh and Infidel parts of the world; and the ſecond, dated 1738, confirming the firſt patent, and alſo impowering the Society to cauſe ſuch of the children as they think fit, to be inſtructed in huſbandry and houſewifery, or in trades and manufactures, &c. —— At preſent ſuffice it further to acquaint the public, That the Society have of late employed a perſon in whom they can confide, to go through their ſchools in the Highlands, Iſlands, and other remote corners of Scotland, and inſpect the behaviour of the ſchoolmaſters, in order to prevent any abuſes of this moſt neceſſary and important charity.

As to America, little intelligence has been lately received from that quarter, intereſting enough to be communicated to the public. — Accounts of the diligence and ſucceſs of Mr Kirkland, one of the Society's Miſſionaries among the North-American Indians, are very agreeable; and a promiſing letter has been received from the Oneida Indians, expreſſed

in

in the unaffected language of Nature.—Some time ago, theſe Indians ſent the Society a Belt of Wampum, a token of friendſhip. By accident, this belt was longer than uſual of coming to hand: but the Society, immediately on receiving it, wrote to their board of correſpondents at Boſton, deſiring them to return the Oneida Indians the Society's thanks for the belt, accompanied with a ſmall preſent in name of the Society. It was on their receiving the preſent that they wrote the above-mentioned letter, addreſſed to the Secretary of the board of correſpondents at Boſton; by whom it has been tranſmitted to the Society.—A copy of it follows, viz.

To the Reverend James Caldwell.

Oneida, December 10. 1770.

FATHER,

WE have not much to ſay, but are very thankful that our belt has revived after ſo long a time, and its preſent language ſounds agreeable in our ears, which at the ſame time reaches the heart with peculiar joy, as we are very poor.

We return thanks to our Fathers beyond the great water, for the conſideration they have made us of Ten Pounds Sterling. We thank them from our very hearts; and alſo bleſs God, who put it in to their hearts to ſhew us this kindneſs.—The holy word of Jeſus has

has got place amongſt us, and advances.—Many have lately forſaken their ſins to appearance, and turned to God.—There are ſome among us who are very ſtubborn and ſtrong; but Jeſus is almighty, has all ſtrength, and his holy word is very ſtrong too; therefore we hope it will conquer, and ſucceed more and more.—We ſay no more, only aſk our Fathers to pray for us, although they are at a great diſtance.—Perhaps by and by, through the ſtrength and mercy of Jeſus, we ſhall meet in his kingdom above.—Farewell.

TAGAWARON,	Chief of the Bear tribe.
SUGHNAGEAROT,	Wolf tribe.
OJEKHETA,	Turtle tribe.

NAMES

NAMES of the perſons appointed to receive BENEFACTIONS in London and Edinburgh, for the uſe of this SOCIETY.

In LONDON,	John M'Intoſh, junior, Eſq; Merchant.
In EDINBURGH,	John Davidſon, Eſq; Writer to the Signet.

FORM of a BEQUEST or LEGACY.

Item, I give and bequeath the ſum of

to the Society in Scotland for propagating Chriſtian Knowledge, to be applied [*either to the purpoſes of the firſt or ſecond patent, as the donor pleaſes.*]

LISTS of the Preſident, Directors, Officers, and Servants, of the Society, for the year 1772.

PRESIDENT of the General Court.

The Rt Hon. Thomas Earl of Kinnoul.

The

The Committee of DIRECTORS, arranged according to the order of their admiſſion.

James Smollet of Bonhill, Eſq; his Majeſty's Sheriff-depute for the county of Dunbarton, and one of the Commiſſaries of Edinburgh, Preſident.
Mr John Walker Merchant in Edinburgh.
Mr William Galloway Merchant there.
Mr John Forreſt, junior, Merchant there.
Mr Robert Walker, one of the Miniſters of Edinburgh.
Mr Anthony Ferguſon, Merchant in Edinburgh.
Mr Alexander Stevenſon, one of the Depute-Clerks of Seſſion.
Dr Robert Dick, one of the Miniſters of Edinburgh.
Mr John Touch, Miniſter of the Chapel of Eaſe, near Edinburgh.
Mr Alexander Belſches, Advocate.
Mr Alexander Kincaid, his Majeſty's Stationer for Scotland.
Mr John Gordon, Writer to the Signet.
Mr Charles Stuart, Preacher of the Goſpel.
Mr Robert Scott-Moncrieff, Merchant in Edinburgh.
Mr John Caw, Depute-Secretary of the Exciſe.

The OFFICERS and SERVANTS of the Society.

Mr Alexander Tait, one of the Principal Clerks of Seſſion, Secretary.
Mr John Forreſt, Merchant in Edinburgh, Comptroller.
Mr Robert Chalmers, General Accomptant in the Exciſe-Office, Edinburgh, Accomptant.
Mr John Davidſon, Writer to the Signet, Treaſurer.
Mr James Forreſt, Writer to the Signet, Clerk.
Mr David Ruſſell, Accomptant in Edinburgh, Bookholder.
Mr James Brown, Bookſeller.
Alexander Coutts, Officer.

FINIS.